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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

16 June 1959

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: POSSIBILITIES FOR TROUBLE IN LAOS.

1. On June 6, the Lao Government decided to release the leaders of the Neo Lao Hak Zat (NLHZ) from house arrest and to declare the incident of the renegade Pathet Lao battalion ended. At least for the immediate future this decision has reduced the possibility that the Lao Government and military would undertake an overly enthusiastic effort to suppress all pro-Communist elements and thereby risk serious international repercussions. The next crisis in Laos will probably revolve around the impending joint US-French effort to train the Lao Army.

2. On May 29, the US-French talks in Paris on a joint training program for the Lao Army were concluded and a memorandum, "General Principles Looking Toward a Possible Eventual Agreement with the Royal Lao Government on Training of its Army," was submitted to the US and French governments for approval. On the one hand, this memorandum calls for a considerably greater role for the US than the French originally were

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willing to accept. On the other hand, it preserves a far greater role for the French than the Lao Government has indicated it is willing to accept.

3. The vague terms of the memorandum concerning command relationships provide many possibilities for friction between the US and French training personnel. Moreover, the suspicion of many French military and administrative advisors that the US is seeking to elbow them out of Laos will almost certainly complicate the working arrangements. However, we believe that these problems will be less acute at higher military and diplomatic levels and that the French Government will probably be more cooperative than it has in the past, particularly if de Gaulle personally approves the joint-training program, as we believe he will. The French both in Laos and in Paris, appear finally to have realized that the Lao have a strong desire to end the Franco-Lao military relationship. Many French will persist in the belief that the growing anti-French attitude of the Lao is due to US machinations. However, the French, particularly at higher levels, probably are becoming convinced that, at least in the present instance, their best chance of preserving a position in Laos lies in cooperation with the US.

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4. The manner and timing of presenting to the Lao the general principles for joint-training arrived at in the Paris talks are yet to be worked out. No matter how presented, a plan for a joint US-French training program will probably be resisted by the Lao. They have become increasingly outspoken in their dissatisfaction with the French record in Laos and in their desire that the US take over all French functions in training, equipping and advising their army. However, the Lao have little choice but to accept a joint-training program and we believe that they will do so, although probably with some reservations and dissatisfaction.

5. As presently envisaged, US participation in the training program is to be a one-shot, six to 12 month proposition. Near the end of that period there will probably be considerable trouble with either France or Laos, or both. The Lao Government will probably want US training to continue, and may make another strong effort to end French participation. The French, on the other hand, would probably resist an effort to extend the joint program or to place US training functions in Laos on a continuing basis.

6. Initiation of a joint-training program for the Lao Army will almost certainly evoke strong protests from Hanoi, Peking, and Moscow, and probably India. There will probably be a new

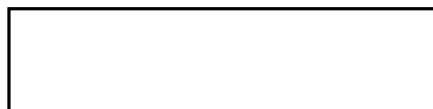
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round of demands for reconvening the ICC-Laos and for a meeting of the Geneva Co-chairman (UK-USSR). Thus far, the UK has stood firm on its position that the Lao Government's actions have not violated the Geneva Accords but have been in fact tolerant in the face of Pathet Lao provocations. If the training program is deftly handled, the UK will probably continue to stand firm. It is possible that Hanoi and/or Peiping may make some military gestures designed to create crises in Laos which could be used to launch a campaign for a high level international conference, including Communist China, to review completely the Geneva Accords or to consider broader Far East issues. Such a crisis, which could involve "volunteers" from North Vietnam, would probably be intended to fallshort of provoking US military intervention, but the chances of miscalculation could be great.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES



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